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SUBJECT: CORRECTED COPY: MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTY REACTIONS TO
JUNTA LETTER

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 140

¶1. (U) Foreign Minister Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamedou's letter to the AU offering a transition of the Presidency to the President of elicited a sharp response from coup opponents, while practically all sides assessed the measure as a last-ditch attempt to avoid EU sanctions. The following is a sample of the reactions.

¶2. (U) The President Abdallahi camp has not made a formal statement but indicated its response would flow with that of the FNDD. Spokesmen for both the FNDD and the Presidential group strongly emphasized that the letter simply does not meet the basic test of a democratic transition, i.e., the removal of the military and the government it installed before any real movement can take place.

¶3. (U) Junta response: None of the official state-run media has reported or commented yet on the letter.

¶4. (U) RFD response: Ahmed Ould Daddah's party wasted no time releasing a communique on the same day that knowledge of the letter became public. The communique highlighted three main points.

i. First, it described the electoral process described in the letter as "unilateral," arguing that all the main components of the upcoming elections are under the control of the High State Council.

ii. Second, it described the resignation of Aziz 45 days before the election as an "unacceptable, cosmetic maneuver."

iii. Third, it stated that the real solution to the crisis is "free and transparent elections, far removed from prefabricated schemes that the country has become all too familiar with."

¶5. (U) FNDD reaction: Although an official communique from the FNDD has not been released, a web site closely allied to the FNDD posted an article blasting Mohamedou's letter, calling it a "vaudevillesque maneuver where the goal is to get Aziz elected through a preordained parody." The article went on to note "the annoyance and feverishness that have taken hold of the Putschist camp and their

henchmen since the implementation of targeted sanctions imposed by the AU Peace and Security Council."

¶6. (U) According to the anti-coup newspaper "Le Renovateur" the proposal confirms General Aziz is "cornered" and is attempting to give his candidacy a veneer of legitimacy to avoid EU sanctions. The proposal's only new element would be the General's acceptance of the constitutional clause allowing the President of the Senate to lead the country during a transition - a possibility originally rejected by the military because it would put a black Mauritanian in power. For the newspaper, the plan does not guarantee electoral transparency, as they would be organized by the Aziz government and the people he put in power, and would benefit from his own candidacy. The only way out of the crisis would be to nominate a transitional government, dissolve the national assembly, organize early elections and isolate the military from politics.

¶7. (U) For the "Nouakchott Info" newspaper, the plan is also a "measure of last resort" to avoid EU sanctions. The newspaper highlights RFD president Ould Daddah's dismissal of the plan as "unilateral," a position echoed by the EU. The newspaper also notes the plan's release following Libyan mediation efforts, which according to this source will take the main political actors to Tripoli to negotiate under Qadhafi's auspices.

¶8. (U) The anti-coup "L'Authentique Quotidien" newspaper led with the headline "The concessions of General Ould Abdel Aziz." Stating that Aziz only offered his proposal "three days before the fateful meeting in Paris February 20," the author argued that "the European Union is awaiting responses [of the FNDD and RFD], which will determine the attitude of the international community with respect to the crisis... What is certain is that the High State Council

partisans are not very optimistic about the EU meeting in Paris, especially with a Czech EU presidency judged to be too close to the American position with respect to the coup d'etat and return of Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi to power." suspicion. Many view it as a stratagem to consolidate power and legitimize the June 6 elections, whereas others think it is a desperate measure to avoid EU sanctions. This is a clever move to co-opt the Europeans and isolate the USG. More than one interlocutor has emphasized that this could be the ultimate proof the General is cornered and willing to negotiate. In either case, the plan is perceived as a unilateral solution that would allow Aziz to use the political machine he has created to legitimize his candidacy and his election. For many, including the FNDD, the political crisis will not end until the military withdraws. European acceptance of Aziz's solution would have devastating consequences as it would consolidate the military's hold, isolate the US, and delegitimize the African Union. End comment.

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